

# *Wrestling Perspective*

• Analysis and Commentary From The McLaughlin Group of Professional Wrestling •

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## *The NWA: How To Succeed In Business With A Little Effort*

Hardcore NWA fans have been pulling their hair out for years over the questionable decisions made by the company. Many say they could turn the NWA from a money loser into the number one promotion if just given the opportunity. However, it's not that simple. If there was an easy solution, it would have been implemented by now. NWA officials want the promotion to succeed and are working hard at evaluating the current situation. There are a number of variables that need to be considered when analyzing why a promotion with such talent is doing so poorly. We have examined 11 issues we think are important for the NWA to be a successful organization.

We are not saying these proposals will make the NWA the top wrestling promotion overnight. In fact, we are not saying these proposals will make the NWA the number one promotion ever. These are simply guidelines that, if implemented, will aid the company's struggle to be successful. Before a company can be number one, it has to be successful. Some solutions are obvious and have been written about elsewhere. Others have not been written about yet. Some suggestions may seem radical or impossible, but the NWA has been a failing promotion for far too long to just ignore this plan. We have forwarded copies of this issue to Jim Herd and Ole Anderson at the NWA's headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We hope they take the time to read and examine our suggestions as, like them, we want the NWA to be successful.

**Announcing** • It should be obvious that the current announcing situation is not working. When you've got Jim Ross, Lance Russell, Jim Cornette, Tony Schiavone, Bob Caudle, Gordon Solie and Paul E. Dangerously working for you, announcing should not be a problem. That, however, is not the case in the NWA. If Ole Anderson has made one major mistake as booker, disrupting the announcing teams would be it. Removing Cornette and Dangerously were blunders. Thankfully, Herd has decided to return Dangerously to the Power Hour. Both have a great deal of talent, are entertaining and deserve to be doing color on the NWA's major programs in addition to their interview segments (segments which should be done live, not in a booth - would Piper's Pit have been anywhere near as effective if it was not done live?).

Ross is an excellent announcer, but nevertheless, is overexposed. Everywhere you look, Ross is doing play-by-play. While Ross is arguably the best in the business, the NWA has Schiavone who is certainly his peer. Yet, fans hardly see Schiavone on television. Instead it is Jim Ross on all the TBS programs, on the WPIX program, on the Clashes and on the Pay-Per-Views. As good as he is, Ross is burning us out. It is time for the NWA to tap the potential of its other announcers.

First, Ross should be removed from the WPIX program and be limited to two NWA programs per week. This will prevent Ross from burn out and reduce his exposure problem.

Second, announcing teams need to be set up and given the chance to work. Every week it seems there is a new announcing team being formed only to be changed next week. This

hardly gives teams a chance to gel and develop a creative rapport. The NWA should put teams together and stick with them for at least two months, allowing them the chance to grow and the fans to get used to them. After two months, Terry Funk and Chris Cruise were one of the most entertaining duos in wrestling. Neither appears to be returning, and few teams will gel that quickly, but given the chance, a number of duos could work.

There really should not be a problem with announcing considering the talent the NWA has. With top notch announcers, all the NWA needs to do is establish good entertaining duos. The NWA should utilize its announcing talent to its fullest capabilities. After all, it's paid for. With strong combinations, some diversity and less Ross, the NWA's announcing problems should disappear.

**Development of Talent** • With the death of the independents, young and still inexperienced future wrestling stars are either being thrust into the spotlight years before they are ready, struggling in tiny promotions while holding a second job or leaving the profession entirely. As each small promotion folds, the proving grounds for wrestlers are becoming more and more scarce. The NWA needs to do something about this before it's too late. Professional baseball and hockey have minor league clubs while basketball and football have colleges where young athletes fine tune their talents. The NWA should develop a farm system where they can develop young wrestlers and prepare them before they make the jump to the "major leagues."

A small promotion, preferably located in Florida since it's close to the Atlanta offices as well as a former hotbed for wrestling, would be financed by the NWA. It will cost money, but in the long run, and the NWA needs to look at things from a long-term perspective, it would be a wise investment. The promotion would run television tapings that would appear on a few local stations and run regular house shows throughout the state. Gordon Solie, Bob Roop, Kevin Sullivan or Dutch Mantell could book the promotion. The NWA could occasionally send Lex Luger, Ric Flair, Sting and the Midnight Express to the region to lend some credibility and excitement to the promotion. They could also report on what wrestlers appear ready to make the jump to the NWA. Finally, when a wrestler has learned enough, bring him to the NWA.

If this farm system was already established, it would have been the ideal place for El Gigante to start. Instead, he is being rushed before he is ready and having terrible matches. If NWA officials do not want to start up their own farm system, they should consider working out a deal with Don Owen. The Pacific Northwest could become the NWA's farm team to develop talent. This would provide a proving ground for young talent which would benefit the NWA. Owen would benefit by having a reputation as a stepping stone to the big leagues and dozens of wrestlers would be eager to join his promotion. Owen's problem of a depleted talent roster would be solved and the NWA would have a steady source of talent upon which to draw. The NWA would also have to send in some top stars to boost business for Owen and lend it some credibility, but with a proposed elimination of "B" shows and a cutback in house shows overall, this would not create a problem for the NWA. Working relationships require cooperation and this would be the one that would be mutually beneficial.

Talent keeps a promotion going. A promotion can package things to look slick and professional, but without new wrestlers coming in from time to time, it will have its woes. The NWA has several excellent workers but there are dozens of active wrestlers that should be working for the big time that go unnoticed. Meanwhile they are bringing in Maximum Overdrive, The New Fantastics and the Master Blasters. Obviously someone is not scouting talent properly.

The NWA should hire talent scouts to monitor the smaller promotions. There are several former wrestlers who would make excellent talent scouts. Nick Bockwinkel or Ray Stevens could scout the AWA, PWA and Windy Cities. Both are students of the game and would recognize good talent. Dory Funk Jr. and Wahoo McDaniel could scout Florida and

the Carolinas. Send scouts to Texas, Tennessee and Portland. These scouts would report weekly to a head scout, perhaps Bockwinkel or Gene Anderson, who would make recommendations to Ole Anderson and Jim Herd. Many of these guys are retired and would love to return to the sport in some capacity. This would be the ideal situation for many of the former greats and would provide the NWA a blueprint upon which to draw future talent.

If there were scouts out searching for new talent, wrestlers like Scotty the Body, Derrick Dukes, Chris Benoit and Owen Hart would be on TBS every weekend. If the NWA didn't think a wrestler was ready, he could work a few months, maybe longer, in the promotion's farm system honing and fine tuning his skills. There is so much talent out there with almost no place for them to learn. Scouts and establishing a small promotion would be a positive step towards having talented wrestlers ready for the big time, at their beck and call.

**House Shows** • With house show attendance steadily declining for the past few years, the NWA may want to avoid over promoting in this area. By this we do not mean failing to promote in the cities the NWA appears, since that would be foolish, but limiting the number of cities in which the NWA appears and the frequency of house shows in general.

The promotion has a few "hot towns" that regularly do good business if a solid card is booked. The NWA should stick to booking Atlanta, certain areas of Georgia and Florida, Baltimore, Philadelphia, East Rutherford whenever possible and the 10 or so other cities that bring in respectable business. Don't waste time with weak cities. If the NWA decides to run shows in new and/or unproven cities, especially in the Northeast and on the West Coast, it is imperative that they showcase their finest performers. Give the audiences Sting, The Midnight Express, Ric Flair, the Steiners and Lex Luger the first time around. Make the fans want to return to the next time the NWA is in town. Even if it is the same two angles that ran in Charlotte, run them in Syracuse, Buffalo and Los Angeles. Give the customers something interesting to talk about as they go home after the matches. Come back in a few months with a strong card and the crowds will return. Don't start out with a solid card and six months later come back with a "B" card. In fact, do away with running two shows on the same night entirely. The NWA is losing money on house shows so cut out the failures and stick to what the promotion is known for - solid, stiff work.

With a cutback in cities and an elimination of "B" shows, the NWA should consider running Thursday through Sunday house shows with television tapings on Tuesdays and/or Wednesdays. Keep the wrestlers fresh and have them go all out since they are only on the road three to four days a week. By eliminating "B" shows, every card should be excellent given the NWA's talent depth. This will also prevent the NWA from double-crossing the fans if a wrestler is injured or misses a show. With a solid "A" lineup, there will be enough people to choose from if a star can't make the show and it will also allow the NWA an opportunity to give a wrestler an occasional night off.

House shows have been cutting into profits for a long time. The only way to approach the house show business is to aggressively hit each market with solid talent and solid promotion and concentrate on the cities that are profitable. Give the people what they want and they will be glad to come back; it's as simple as that. House shows have been a tradition in wrestling since it started, but they will die a painful death unless the NWA is willing to realize that they can't spread their talent thin to create two money losers in one night. House shows may no longer be the major revenue source they once were, but if the NWA attacks each market aggressively with solid cards, there is no reason why they can't be a consistent source of revenue for the company for years to come.

**Localized Promotion** • Pick an adjective synonymous with horrendous and that will describe the NWA's localized promotion. With the exception of the Meadowlands and a few cards in Georgia, the NWA simply is not putting forth the effort needed to successfully promote house shows in the markets they appear in. Rarely does the NWA buy newspaper ads, or television and radio spots when they bring a card to a particular city. They rely on

the syndicated programs and WTBS to sell the card. It has proven to be a less than effective way to promote house shows.

When the NWA came to the Meadowlands in August, they had special localized advertisements for the card on WPIX. They worked out a promotional campaign with a local radio station and they bought television spots and print ads. They drew a respectable crowd with a six-figure gate. In May, the NWA drew 400 people (a liberal estimate) in Syracuse, New York without any radio, print or television spots (with the exception of the spots on their syndicated television program). Syracuse has a population of about 160,000 and the WWF regularly draws 4,000 to 5,000 people per card in Syracuse. The NWA should learn a lesson from this situation. House shows require promotion in each and every market to be successful. They can't limit their efforts to only New York and Atlanta where there is the potential of a six-figure gate. The old adage of it takes money to make money comes into play here. It is necessary to spend money promoting a card to make money on a card.

When the NWA books a card they should follow these guidelines for local promotion:

- 1) Announce the card at least six weeks in advance on their syndicated programs.
- 2) Work out promotional arrangements with a local radio station for ticket giveaways; preferably one strong in the demographics they are targeting.
- 3) Buy television and radio spots and begin airing them at least two weeks prior to the event.
- 4) Buy print ads in the daily and Sunday papers. The Sunday ad should appear the Sunday prior to the event and the ads in the daily should appear the day of the event.
- 5) Buy print ads in a local weekly entertainment paper. These ads should be placed the week before and the week of the event.
- 6) Arrange local appearances. They can be most anything from a fundraiser for the Arthritis Foundation to a local television talk show.
- 7) As part of the local radio promotion make sure Sting, Jim Cornette, Lex Luger, Paul E. Dangerously and Ric Flair appear on the morning drive or afternoon drive show. This will help promote the card, particularly with talkers like Cornette, Dangerously and Flair.
- 8) Contact the local television stations and try to get them to promote the card during the sports segment of their newscasts. This is difficult, but if the NWA allows them to tape some portions (though not the endings) of the matches to air on the 11 o'clock newscasts, some stations may be receptive to it. A gamble, but worth taking.
- 9) Place posters everywhere tickets are sold and anywhere businesses, people and city ordinances will allow them to be placed. Plaster the city with NWA posters about the upcoming card. The more people see the posters, the more likely they are to attend. Also as a measure of goodwill, after the card is over, the NWA should take down posters that were placed in public places so as not to confuse the fans and maintain a positive image with the city.
- 10) Buy television spots promoting the local card during the local avail time on the WWF's Prime Time Wrestling and All American Wrestling shows on USA. This is dirty pool, and the NWA should make a point of advertising the event as an NWA event, but there is no better way to attract the potential crossover fan. At a time when the WWF does everything it can to make life difficult for the NWA, it only seems fitting to utilize the WWF's drawing power to the NWA's advantage.

By implementing these procedures, the NWA could effectively draw people out to the arenas to see house shows. What goes on in the house shows is another topic, but getting the fans out to the arena is a positive step, provided the NWA can put a positive taste in the fans' mouths. They have enough solid talent that this should not be a problem.

**National Exposure** • What can the NWA do to get their wrestlers in the public eye? This is a question the promotion official must ask themselves everyday. During the past



few months, there have been some improvements in this area, but the NWA still has a long way to go. The week long-appearance on Family Feud in May, the Connie Chung piece after the May Pay-Per-View, and Sting and Lex Luger's rather uncomfortable appearance on Sonya Live were three steps backwards to mainstream their performers that should have been three major steps forwards. The only positive step the NWA has taken recently has been the MTV visit by Jim Cornette and The Midnight Express which reportedly was a typical Cornette appearance; in other words, it went well.

The NWA's goal should be to get their wrestlers on Arsenio Hall, David Letterman, Later With Bob Costas, Donahue and other mainstream television programs. Television viewers are seeing the NWA stars more and more, but the problem is the hosts of these shows are making fools out of the wrestlers, or worse, the wrestlers make themselves out to be dimwitted muscleheads. Thus the goal of getting the the NWA wrestlers on mainstream television needs an extra ingredient for it to be effective. An acting coach is what's necessary. A coach should sit down with the wrestlers and go over what the wrestlers should be doing in front of the camera. The NWA wants to be major league, but most of the television appearances have been very unprofessional. Properly coached, wrestlers will feel more at ease on television and will be ready to tackle Hall, Letterman or anyone else. In the meantime, the NWA must only allow people like Ric Flair, Arn Anderson, Paul E. Dangerously and Cornette and The Midnight Express to make public appearances as they are the only guys who can carry themselves well enough to make the promotion look good.

Since the NWA is owned by Ted Turner, the promotion should use his TV stations for free publicity. Sonya Live was a good first step, but, unfortunately, that did not work out. The NWA should contact Larry King about an appearance on his show. TBS should be running promos with the top NWA stars that would be televised during other programs on the station. The Sting/Burger King commercial was good, but how often did anyone see it? The Roos commercials were great, but the sneaker company is as organized as the NWA. The NWA is trying to build a solid base with smaller TV projects and steadily grow. The problem is the wrestlers can't do small-time stuff. Teach them, coach them and prepare them properly. Until Sting, Lex Luger and the Steiners are ready, rely on the people who can get over. Eventually the others will develop and when that time comes, Arsenio and Letterman will be calling the NWA to have wrestlers on their programs. Ignore the issue, let them continue to make fools out themselves, push Flair, Dangerously and Cornette aside and they'll be very lucky to appear on the Joe Franklin program.

**No Shows** • The problem of no shows is one that could be avoided with strict management. No shows are unacceptable. When a performer is advertised for a card, the fans have the right to expect to see him. When a wrestler, particularly a main eventer, no shows a card, the fans feel cheated, the company gets a bad reputation and risks losing future business.

There are acceptable reasons for a no show. Illness, injury, transportation problems (through no fault of the wrestler) and personal problems are certainly valid reasons for missing an event. Simply not showing up for a card with no explanation, or one that is unsatisfactory is inexcusable. It is unfair to the fans and the company. It is a situation that has been going on for a long time in the NWA and needs to be rectified immediately if the NWA ever has hopes of being a successful promotion.

Fortunately, the solution is rather simple. If a wrestler no shows an event for an unacceptable reason, he should be fine 25 percent of that week's salary. If he misses two shows that week, 50 percent and so on. If the wrestler is involved in a main event, the fine should be at least 30 percent. This is a simple corrective measure that would be successful. It needs to be applied uniformly from Ric Flair and Sting down to the Cuban Assassin. No one wants to lose money and wrestlers are more likely to show up for an event if they realize they have something to lose if they no show. The wallet is the most effective way to prevent no shows.

There are times when a no show is known in advance and management does not inform the fans. This too, damages the company. As soon as the company knows a wrestler will not be appearing at an event, it is their responsibility to let the fans know as soon as possible. Sid Vicious was advertised for a month after he was hospitalized. Stan Lane is advertised in Florida when the NWA knows he won't show up due to legal problems. Such behavior is dishonest. It's false advertising. There is no acceptable reason for a company to advertise a wrestler when they know he will not appear. If a wrestler is injured before a card, the company should announce it at the beginning of the card and offer refunds. Few people will take them up on the offer and, more importantly, it shows courtesy and respect for their audience. It's an act of good faith that will be remembered the next time a fan considers buying a ticket. The audience supporting the NWA has dropped dramatically over the past few years. A key reason has been dishonest and disrespectful promoting tactics. That audience could be recaptured if the NWA treated them properly, let them know the truth about no shows and offered refunds when they occurred. The NWA hardly ever does this. Yet, they still wonder why their crowds continue to diminish.

The problem of no shows needs to be corrected immediately. The false advertising needs to be corrected sooner. Until this happens, the NWA will continue to have problems drawing consistent respectable numbers at their house shows.

**Promoting From Top To Bottom** • When fans spend \$15 to \$25 on a house show or a Pay-Per-View, they deserve to see more than one or two interesting matches. Each match at a card should have its own story and there should be a good reason why two wrestlers are in the ring against each other.

The NWA has taken some positive steps recently in developing feuds with mid-level wrestlers. The Tommy Rich/Stam Hansen and the Southern Boys/Freebirds feuds have both generated good heat. But, unfortunately, not enough is being done to promote feuds among other mid-level performers. The Steiners took the US Tag Belts from the Midnight Express (Why?), yet the Midnight Express was not on the Clash demanding a rematch. Instead the Steiners squash a team no one has heard of. Why? Why was Mike Rotunda wrestling Buddy Landell at the Clash? Why did Rotunda wrestle the Sheik at the Bash? Why did Brian Pillman wrestle Buddy Landell at the Bash? Why did Harley Race wrestle Tommy Rich at the Bash? Every match needs some type of buildup and some type of angle. No buildup translates to no interest which translates to no heat which translates to "Boring" chants from the crowd.

As we stated in issue #4, all PPVs should be supercards. Every match should have some meaning. The NWA must establish mid-level and preliminary feuds with all their wrestlers. Pair them off, have run-ins and angles with wrestlers besides the Four Horsemen and the Dudes with Attitudes. Have Dutch Mantell bust a package of candy over Brad Armstrong's head. Have Big Van Vader attack Brian Pillman with his helmet. With six hours of television time every week there is certainly enough time to develop creative angles to promote the entire promotion, not just its superstars. The NWA has improved in this area since Ole Anderson took over as booker and the Gauntlet idea may be a good way to create some new feuds, but they still have a way to go until every match is important. Again, think back to Starrcade '88 where every match had some meaning. By Starrcade '90, the NWA should have enough angles developed that every match has meaning. Frankly, this should happen by Halloween Havoc '90, but we are being generous. The opening bouts needn't be "hot feuds," but don't have the audience wondering why two wrestlers are facing each other. Because, ultimately, they may ask why they should pay another \$15 to \$25 to see the NWA.

**Quality Talent and Contracts** • In 1989 the NWA made a major step forward as the instituted contracts for a number of their wrestlers. The contracts had a set yearly figure and allowed the wrestlers to live like other athletes. They no longer had to depend on gate receipts for their income and when they were injured, like other professional athletes, they were compensated during their recovery period. This was a fantastic move for the NWA as

it treated the wrestlers like human beings and took into account that wrestlers had families to support. Perhaps a drawback has been that some wrestlers may have taken advantage of the situation. In fact, some may say Eddie Gilbert manipulated the NWA's contract agreement to get out of it. It is difficult to tell. In any profession, there will be people who take advantage of contracts. There are people who use workmen's compensation to their own advantage while treating the company unfairly. But, these few people should not be allowed to ruin something that is necessary for wrestlers to live humanely and for the NWA to maintain quality talent.

The NWA needs quality talent at all times. The emphasis of the NWA should include a the highest work rate standard possible. This means holding onto top-notch talent like Ric Flair, Barry Windham, The Midnight Express, The Steiners, Lex Luger and Arn Anderson. Top talent will only stay in an organization so long if they are not getting paid fairly and treated decently. While there certainly are some mid-level guys who don't deserve a contract, the NWA needs to have contracts for all the mid-level and top-level wrestlers they have. It is the only way to prevent talent raids. If the NWA no longer offers contracts to The Midnight Express (a huge mistake as they are so popular and so good) the Steiners, Brian Pillman and people of that caliber, they will find themselves consistently raided by the WWF. In effect, they will become a money losing farm system for the WWF. The only difference is the WWF has no investment in the NWA. Preserving top-notch talent is the only way the NWA will be able to survive and compete with the WWF. The way to do this is to keep wrestlers under contracts. Also, should the NWA develop a farm system, they need to keep the wrestlers in the farm system under some form of contract to prevent the WWF from raiding their farming grounds as well. We realize this is an extremely costly proposition and in some cases the NWA will be double-crossed by some wrestlers. But the long-term benefits and overall positives outweigh the few negatives that may result from such a situation.

Yes, the NWA needs to concentrate on developing young talent, but they need to keep established veterans who can provide excellent matches. The NWA's audience is demanding. They want solid work. They will boo, unmercifully, guys who aren't ready; remember the Ding Dongs. The answer to the talent problems lies not with bringing in guys who aren't ready, but developing them and keeping solid seasoned veterans to help develop wrestlers as they break into the big time, as well as provide excellent matches with each other.

Finally, we suggest the NWA make a solid effort to obtain Ricky Steamboat, Tully Blanchard and Chris Adams. They are quality wrestlers who could help the NWA immensely. Provide them with good contracts and they will provide the NWA with top-notch action, and provided the NWA can promote them properly, they might even be able to bring people out the arenas.

Good talent is hard to find and even harder to maintain when there is competition like Titan. But if the NWA treated its wrestlers right and provides them with solid contracts and opportunities, they will not have to worry about talent raids in the future. The future of the NWA lies with solid talent, young and old. Not inexperienced cheap talent.

**Television Product** • The NWA's television product is a mirror image of the promotion: inconsistent and disorganized. The NWA's television product can be broken down into two parts: production quality and purpose.

*Production Quality* - At times, the production quality is fantastic and almost up to Titan standards. Other times it is no better than the USWA. For the most part the production quality ranges from fair to good, while rarely being outstanding. For the NWA to be perceived as a major league promotion, it is imperative that they make their television product as visually pleasing as possible. Shouldn't a major promotion's television product look as good as the WWF's television product? If not as good, at least close?



A major problem with the NWA's television product is the number of technical/planning errors that slip through - the same Jim Cornette interview airing twice in a program, cutting away from a video before it is over, missed camera shots, camera shots so close that all the viewer sees is an elbow or can barely follow the action because the cameramen have zoomed in too close, crowd shots during fast-paced action. These types of occurrences are unacceptable from a major promotion. Repeated interviews and poorly planned videos merely make the promotion look second rate. Poor camera angles are visually unappealing and detract from the action. Missed shots frustrate the viewer. What good is a brawl outside the ring if the cameras aren't picking it up? Programs are run out of chronological order. Often, an ending of a match will be given away before it even airs or surprises will be given away by the NWA advertisement for upcoming matches. Syndicated shows are airing the ending of TBS matches before they even air on TBS. Advertisements are telling us Arn Anderson will be wrestling before he has even been introduced as returning. Surprises are ruined, and thus ineffective.

These types of problems can easily be corrected. The NWA simply needs to press this issue with its directors. They need to emphasize that technical and planning errors will not be tolerated. That such errors, if they continue, will result in disciplinary action. No one is perfect. We are not suggesting the NWA's television production be perfect, but the number of errors that slip by every week are ridiculous. If the current staff is incapable of producing quality television, then they should be replaced. If it is because they are understaffed, then they should hire more people. Improving television production should not be difficult. It requires careful and effective planning, but for some reason it just isn't happening and it is a necessary step toward becoming successful.

*Purpose* - The NWA's television product often lacks direction, but this is partly because there doesn't appear to be a set purpose for the television product. In the July issue of *Ringside Reflector*, the Blade wrote a column where he stated a promotion can either concentrate on good television ratings, good house shows or Pay-Per-Views. He also feels these goals are mutually exclusive. We disagree. The WWF has proven this. Each week, they have solid ratings, the best gates night after night and the best PPV buy rates of any promotion. The NWA should learn from the WWF's example in this instance. The purpose of the television shows should be to get good ratings, sell the house shows and sell the PPVs.

Of these three items, ratings are the hardest one to figure out, since audiences are fickle. What appeals to them one week may not the next. But, if the NWA presents consistently entertaining broadcasts, the ratings will range from good to excellent. Such was the case during the last few months of Ric Flair's tenure as booker. There should be at least one angle created or further developed each program. This will keep fans interested in the program and want to tune in the next week. Remember all the angles with the Freebirds in the early 80s. Every week people tuned in to see what they had done next or to see if they had finally been taken care of. If there was something happening every broadcast, fans would be more likely to tune in. This is particularly important for the syndicated programs as presently there is rarely anything worth watching on them.

The NWA has been unable to translate decent television ratings into decent house show business. This is the result of a number of things, most notably the NWA's inability to promote in local markets. But, a major reason has to be a lack of focus and direction with the television product. The NWA needs to have the television product give the fans a reason to come out to the arenas. It needs to have solid angles. It needs to promote the local cards well. It involves giving the promotion a direction and pushing that direction as hard as possible. It is by no means simple, but without focus and direction the NWA will continue to flounder as will its television product and, resultantly, its house show business.

Finally, the NWA needs to use television as a vehicle to promote its PPVs. To an extent they do this, but not nearly with as much effectiveness as the WWF. A PPV line up should be solidified at least six weeks prior to the card. This doesn't mean every match should be



announced six weeks prior to the event. In fact a hot angle one week before the PPV with a contract signing for the PPV could help boost the buy rate. But, so often only the main event is only known until two weeks before the card and currently, no one in the NWA is hot enough to sell a PPV buy himself. The NWA needs to promote up and down the card for it to be effective. With the amount of television exposure the NWA has with WTBS and its syndicated programs, it should be able to use this airtime as an effective marketing tool. Again, this is one area where the NWA could learn a great deal from the WWF.

Given a television product that is well-produced and has a solid direction, the NWA should be able to have decent ratings, respectable house shows and killer PPVs. There is enough talent to do it. It will take a lot of work, but it's a necessary step towards being successful.

**The Power Hour & Turner Network Television** • Recently, the NWA Power Hour has become a throw away show. WTBS has preempted, delayed, joined in progress or simply moved the show so many times that the casual viewer has no idea when the program will run. The Power Hour's recent ratings are a testament to this fact. The Power Hour has become a program that serves little more than to take up extra time at NWA television tapings. However, there is a way to use the Power Hour as an effective marketing tool and maintain a loyal following. It is by utilizing Turner Network Television (TNT).

Rather than run the Power Hour on WTBS, the NWA should convince Turner Broadcasting to place the Power Hour on TNT. Friday nights would be ideal, but any night of the week would be possible as long as it does not compete with the World Championship Wrestling or the NWA Main Event. By placing the Power Hour on TNT, two benefits would occur. First, the Power Hour would be less likely to be preempted as TNT only runs basketball and football games. These generally don't go over as often as baseball does and there are fewer games that would interfere as TBS runs basketball, baseball, football and the Goodwill Games. Secondly, the NWA could use the Power Hour to more effectively promote local house shows. The process is simple. TNT, unlike WTBS, which is a broadcast superstation, is a cable network. As such, it provides the cable operator with a certain number of minutes each hour of local advertising time (known as local avails). The NWA could by this time (as rates are generally dirt cheap), make localized promos with the wrestlers and have the cable operator insert the commercials during the local avail time. They could do this in each market they are scheduling house shows for six weeks. In markets they don't have a date scheduled, they would simply let the cable operator sell the local time to someone else, until they schedule a date and could buy avail time again.

By using the Power Hour's local avails, the NWA would be able to effectively promote in a each market. The Power Hour's numbers in many markets are better than those of the NWA's syndicated programs so this would give the house shows more exposure. This does require convincing the powers at TBS, but it would be worth the effort. While TNT's penetration is lower than WTBS, it still reaches over 47 million homes and could be an effective marketing tool if used properly.

**Work Rate** • It is important for the NWA to distinguish itself from the competition. One of the best ways to do this is by setting the standard by which all other promotions are judged in the ring. No hardcore fan questions that the NWA consistently puts on better matches than the WWF, but the casual viewer may have difficulty understanding why a Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat match is so much more entertaining to us than Hulk Hogan vs. Earthquake. But, if all of the matches in the NWA were three star matches of better, then perhaps the casual viewer might notice the difference.

The easiest way for the NWA to distinguish itself in the ring would be to rely on flying maneuvers, unfortunately something Ole Anderson is rumored not to be keen on. He must realize that a casual fan requires something different from the NWA. Otherwise they will be perceived as a disorganized WWF. By putting an emphasis on fliers, the casual fan

is likely to flip on the channel and say "Wow these guys are all over the ring, there seems to be a lot more action." It won't happen overnight, but given time, it could happen. The work rate of the NWA should rival the Japanese promotions. High spots should be part of the package, not avoided. The NWA has some of the best talent in the world. There is no reason why they can't consistently provide good to excellent matches at house shows, on television and on the Pay-Per-Views. Fliers are not the total answer. Good brawlers and technicians are also necessary, but to de-emphasize fliers would be a major step backwards.

This also brings up a second point - lazy workers. There are numerous reasons why a wrestler may have a bad match. No one is discounting the effects of injuries, travel, personal problems, hangovers or what have you. But, when a fan pays for a ticket, he/she is entitled to the best performance the wrestler is capable of providing. It means the wrestlers must work their tail off. This is their job and it's what the fans pay to see. It means five minute restholds are unacceptable. It means wrestlers have no right to slack off simply because they are in a small town they don't want to be in. It means if a wrestler starts to slack off for something other than injuries, sickness or personal problems he should be reprimanded and warned about his performance. It means if his performance does not improve he should be fined or, eventually, fired. When one is paid to do a job, it is his responsibility to do that job to the best of his ability. It's his job put in the best performance possible. Everyone expects baseball players to put in their best effort every game. Everyone expects musicians to put out their best effort every performance. Try to picture Ryne Sandberg not trying to hit the ball because he didn't feel like it. Try to picture Vladimir Horowitz leaving out a few bars here and there of a Chopin Nocturne because he didn't feel like playing them. Every wrestling fan should expect wrestlers to put out the best they are capable of every night. We aren't claiming this is easy. In fact we know this to be extremely difficult. But as Willie Stargell once said while he wearily headed to the airport after a tough game "I ain't complaining, I asked to be a ballplayer."

**A Final Word** • There are a number of problems in the NWA. The above proposals do not provide all the answers to all the NWA's problems. Indeed, many of the problems go far beyond what we have discussed. Many problems are the result of poor internal communication and an overworked small staff. Other problems like continual screw-job finishes and fake title switches occur for no apparent reason at all. The list of problems goes on and on and our suggestions are by no means exhaustive. Instead, we hope they serve as a foundation upon which the NWA can grow and eventually flourish. We have addressed issues we believe are important and we hope the NWA takes our suggestions to heart as we truly wish for their success. Because, to this day, we remain loyal, diehard NWA fans.

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Next issue will feature interviews with a famous wrestler, a trainer and a promoter. Don't miss it.